

The National Guard Of West Virginia During The Strike Period Of 1912-1913

By Kyle McCormick

The history of the National Guard of West Virginia includes approximately nine months of strike duty in the Cabin Creek and Paint Creek mine strikes of 1912-1913. During this time during the administrations of Governors William Glasscock and Henry D. Hatfield, the National Guards were called out three times and military courts were set up three times and martial law was declared.

As many as 1,500 guardsmen of West Virginia were on duty at one time in this strike-ridden area. The guard set up three military courts that tried and sentenced more than 200 persons to jail or prison sentences on many charges such as intimidation of workmen, larceny, adultery, disorderly conduct, doing police duty in violation of the law, resisting a sentinel, carrying concealed weapons, and perjury. The sentences ran as high as seven years in prison.

It is true that all these men sentenced to jail were released by either Governor Glasscock or Governor Hatfield, if the sentences had not been served. Among the prisoners who were sentenced were Mother Jones, the celebrated labor organizer.

The National Guard also collected weapons, mostly from the coal companies or the mine guards of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, and also from other mine guards, and quite a number from miners. They totaled 2,360, including six machine guns, 482 pistols, 453 repeating rifles, 84 old style mountain rifles, 301 small repeating rifles, and 1136 shotguns of various types. They were piled behind the Capitol in Charleston.

After the strike was settled by Governor Hatfield and the coal fields were in operation again, two socialist newspapers were dissatisfied with the results and kept up the agitation for more strike action. These two papers were suppressed by the National Guard under orders from the Chief Executive. They were the *Socialist* and *Labor Star* of Huntington. Two editors, Elmer Rumbaugh and W. H. Thompson, were placed in the Cabell County jail, also the *Labor Argus* of Charleston was suppressed. The legality of this action was questioned in courts on the grounds that martial law did not extend to Charleston and Huntington. The courts ruled that if these papers circulated in the territory covered by martial law, that the martial law applied to them also.

There are two histories of the West Virginia National Guard in the Department of Archives and History of West Virginia. The whole story of the strike duty was skipped in these histories, although



ARMS AND AMMUNITION

These are the several thousand rifles, shotguns and small arms stacked behind the old State Capitol together with several hundred thousand rounds of ammunition in the boxes. This Capital building was destroyed by fire in 1921.

it is not shown that the guard did anything it did not have to do or was not ordered to do in these actions.

That is one fault of so-called histories of any kind—they skip the unpleasant facts, and this is particularly true of southern histories.

The guard was called out on September 5, 1912, to stop a mob of some 2,000 persons in Princeton from lynching a colored man, Robert Johnson, but when the guard got to Deepwater on the Virginian Railway, it found that Johnson had been lynched and so the guard returned to Charleston. Johnson was afterward thought to be innocent.